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DOCTOR KNOCK

Doctor Knock

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

Jules Romains

In an English version by

Harley Granville-Barker

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DOCTOR KNOCK

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

DOCTOR KNOCK.
DOCTOR PARPALAID.
MOUSQUET.
BERNARD.
THE TOWN CRIER.
A COUNTRY FELLOW.
ANOTHER COUNTRY FELLOW.
SCIPIO.
JEAN.
MADAME PARPALAID.
MADAME RÉMY.
A FARMER'S WIFE.
MADAME PONS.
A NURSE.

This version of "Knock" has been done for the theatre, for English actors to play to an English audience. I have had to provide, then, dialogue which could be spontaneously spoken and currently understood. So there are passages—not more than a dozen, I dare say—which have not been literally translated. Some would have called, so, for technical explanation, and there is no place for footnotes on the dramatic page. Some few phrases, harmless enough, would not sound to English ears as they do to French. It is a question of custom. And the translator must always try for an equivalent effect. I confess to a certain elaboration of the stage directions, but this is based upon Monsieur Louis Jouvet's admirable production in Paris. And I do not think my translation betrays any of Monsieur Romains' intentions. I hope not, at least, for I have tried to be most faithful to them.

H. G.-B.

January 26, 1925.

ACT I

The scene is in and around a motor-car; a very old motor-car, built certainly not later than 1902. *We have almost forgotten these strange vehicles, with their Dutch-oven shaped bonnets and enormous bastioned bodies, in which the temerarious travellers were perched. During the act this antediluvian monster moves and its surroundings change. But we first see it standing outside a small railway station in one of the mountainous districts of France. From the station come the rather more than middle-aged Dr. Parpalaid and his wife. They are followed by Dr. Knock; and he, in turn, is followed by Dr. Parpalaid's servant, an old country man-of-all-work, who is carrying Knock's luggage, and who is to drive the car.*

PARPALAID. And have we all your luggage, my dear sir ?

KNOCK. We have, Dr. Parpalaid.

PARPALAID. Jean will take it in front with him . . . and we can make ourselves quite comfortable . . . yes, the three of us . . . at the back. So roomy . . . and the seats you let down . . .

perfect arm-chairs. These modern cars . . . one might as well be in a canoe.

KNOCK (*to Jean who is piling the things in*). Please be careful of that box. It has appliances in it . . . they're breakable.

MADAME PARPALAID (*to her husband*). Ah . . . I've never been sorry we said No to all the offers we've had for this car.

Knock now surveys the vehicle with some slight surprise.

PARPALAID. You have, as one may say, the convenience of a car with the comfort of a barouche.

KNOCK. True . . . true!

By this time the front seat is well choked with the bags.

PARPALAID. Notice, for instance, how the luggage fits in . . . not the least in the driver's way. It's a pity you've no more. You'd see what she can do when she's put to it.

KNOCK. Is it far to St. Maurice?

PARPALAID. Six miles. Just the right distance from the railway, I suggest to you, for the keeping a practice together. Patients don't play you the trick of going to see doctors in the county town.

KNOCK. No omnibus?

PARPALAID. An old shandrydan. Use it once and you'll walk ever after.

MADAME PARPALAID. No . . . one can't do without a car here. . . .

PARPALAID. In our profession.

To this Knock makes no response.

JEAN (*to Parpalaid*). Shall I start her up ?

PARPALAID. Yes . . . yes ! I should start starting her up.

MADAME PARPALAID. We pass through a most charming piece of country . . . which Zoraide Fleuriot has described in one of her stories . . . one of her finest stories . . . though I fear the name of it now escapes me. (*As she gets in she says to her husband*) You'll sit sideways. Doctor Knock by me . . . then he can see the view better.

PARPALAID. Not that a car like this won't take three on the back seat with the utmost ease. Still . . . you do want room to turn in to see a view. (*Then to Jean*) All well ? Is the petrol flowing nicely . . . into both cylinders ? Have you wiped the sparking-plugs ? It's always as well to after a six or seven-mile run. And wrap up the carburetter . . . an old handkerchief is better than this rag. (*He comes round to the back of the car again.*) Yes . . . all's well . . . all's well. (*And he gets in.*) I'll sit here . . . excuse me, my dear sir. Really it is a movable arm-chair !

MADAME PARPALAID. The road climbs all the way to St. Maurice. Walking, with one's bags to carry, it would be a terrible business. But in a car . . . how delightful !

PARPALAID (*expanding*). Once upon a time, my dear sir . . . once upon a time, I used to woo the Muse. And I wrote a sonnet . . . a fourteen-line sonnet . . . to these same wonders of Nature that

we are about to show you. For the life of me, though, I can't remember it now.

"Ye valleys deep, where happy labouring swains..."

While they sit thus Jean is desperately cranking, cranking. . . .

MADAME PARPALAID. Albert, for these last two or three years you will begin it "Ye valleys deep." But surely it was always "Ye valleys green."

PARPALAID. You're right . . . you're right.

"Ye valleys green. . . ."

The engine fires.

PARPALAID. Aha! D'you hear? She's going to start. Just a turn or two more of the handle . . . to vaporise sufficient gas and . . . aha! one! . . . another! . . . we're off!!

Jean gets in. There is a rattling of gears. The car throbs away. The scene slowly changes as the road winds up among the hills. The travellers sit in silence for a few moments; then Parpalaid leans forward and taps Knock encouragingly on the knee.

PARPALAID. Well, well! The King is dead . . . long live the King! Yes, my dear sir . . . from this moment. And I congratulate you. Yes, from this very moment, my practice is yours. And, if on the road we meet a patient who happens to recognise me in spite of the speed we're travelling . . . stops me and asks my advice . . . my answer will be: "No, my good friend, no . . . here is

your doctor now. As for me. . . . (*The motor starts exploding spasmodically.*) I don't open my mouth again unless you should do me the honour to call me into consultation. (*More explosions.*) But you've had great luck, may I tell you, in happening on a man who meant to tempt fortune himself once again.

MADAME PARPALAID. Yes . . . he has always promised himself that when he did retire it should be from a town practice.

PARPALAID. Singing my swan song where the world may hear it! Folly . . . folly! Paris was my heart's desire . . . Lyon will have to do.

MADAME PARPALAID. And when he might have gone on quietly making a fortune here!

Knock looks at each of them in turn, gives a glance at the view and seems thoughtful.

PARPALAID. But it's not for you, my very dear sir, to make fun of me. For it's thanks to this little weakness of mine that I sell you my practice here for a song.

KNOCK. Would you call it that?

PARPALAID. Oh . . . you'll see.

KNOCK. Well . . . I didn't do much bargaining, did I?

PARPALAID. You did not . . . and I liked you the better for it. And I liked . . . I liked your settling it all by letter. Here we are meeting for the first time with our agreements signed and sealed in our pockets. Most sporting! Quite . . .

quite American! But I say again . . . you're in luck. A settled connection . . . and all to yourself.

MADAME PARPALAID. Not another doctor near.

PARPALAID. A chemist who sticks to his own job.

MADAME PARPALAID. And a town that you can't spend money in if you try.

PARPALAID. No costly amusements.

MADAME PARPALAID. Why, in six months' time you'll have saved what the practice has cost you . . . twice over.

PARPALAID. And you've only to pay it in quarterly instalments. Well, well . . . if it hadn't been for my wife's rheumatism, I doubt if I'd have said Yes after all.

KNOCK. Oh . . . you suffer, Madame, from rheumatism.

MADAME PARPALAID. I'm sorry to say it.

PARPALAID. The healthiest of climates. But it just doesn't suit her.

KNOCK. Is there much rheumatism about?

PARPALAID. Is there . . .? My dear Sir! Isn't there!

KNOCK. That's very interesting.

PARPALAID. Oh . . . if you're interested in rheumatism . . .!

KNOCK. In treating it.

PARPALAID. Ah . . . no, there's nothing in that. People here will no more come to you for their rheumatism than you'd go to the parish priest and ask him to provide a little fine weather.

KNOCK. Very tiresome of them.

MADAME PARPALAID. But isn't this a wonderful view? We might be in Switzerland!

The car has begun to make most ominous noises. Jean speaks over his shoulder to the doctor.

JEAN. Something's gone wrong again . . . yes, there's something wrong. I'll have to 'tend to that carburetter.

PARPALAID. Must you? Right! I was just thinking . . . let's stop here a minute or two.

MADAME PARPALAID. Why?

PARPALAID. And get a good look at the mountains.

MADAME PARPALAID. You see them better higher up.

But the car has stopped and Madame Parpalaid understands.

PARPALAID. Then we'll stop higher up as well. For, after all, there's nothing to stop us . . . stopping whenever we want to. We're not road-hogs, thank Heaven! Do notice, my dear sir . . . how easily and accurately the car stops. Perfect control over pace . . . most important in a hilly country. Aha! . . . we shall make a motorist of you . . . and sooner than you think. But beware of trying up-to-date rubbish! It's the stuff your car's made of which tells.

So now they get out of the car and stroll about a bit.

KNOCK. If rheumatism goes for nothing I suppose pneumonias may be worth a bit . . . and pleurisies?

PARPALAID. Jean . . . as we have stopped give a look to your carburetter. Pleurisy, you were saying, my dear doctor . . . and pneumonia. Well, neither is common. The air here . . . you can feel it . . . is bracing, very bracing. If you're a weakly child you die in your first six months . . . before the doctor has time to do much for you. If you survive your first six months . . . well, you take a lot of killing! Apoplexies . . . bad hearts . . . oh, yes. People who are certain there's nothing the matter with them and fall down dead when they're fifty.

KNOCK. But you've not made your fortune, I take it, by writing out death certificates.

PARPALAID. Ha, ha! No . . . good! . . . no, certainly not. Well, there's always the influenza. Not the common influenza, of course. They rather like a touch of that. They think a good septic cold once a year keeps them from catching all sorts of other things. No, but the big epidemics . . . the world-wide epidemics.

KNOCK. If I've to wait for a world-wide epidemic!

PARPALAID. I've seen two. One in 89–90 . . . one in 1918.

MADAME PARPALAID. And in 1918 our death-rate was really high . . . oh, higher than in some of the very biggest towns. You compared the figures, didn't you?

PARPALAID. Oh, yes, we were ahead . . . we were well ahead.

KNOCK. And they sent for you then?

PARPALAID. Usually when it was too late.

MADAME PARPALAID. But at Michaelmas the books . . . I keep them . . . looked very well indeed.

KNOCK. I beg your pardon.

MADAME PARPALAID. The people here pay at Michaelmas.

KNOCK. At Michaelmas !

PARPALAID. Twenty-ninth of September.

KNOCK. And to-day's October the third. What a good time to choose for parting with the practice. But . . . if they come to your dispensary they pay on the nail ?

PARPALAID. No, at Michaelmas. That's the custom.

KNOCK. But if they come just once . . . and you're never going to see them again ?

PARPALAID. They pay at Michaelmas.

MADAME PARPALAID. Not till Michaelmas.

Knock looks first at the doctor, then at Madame Parpalaid. A silence falls. Jean is now lying on his back beneath the car.

MADAME PARPALAID. And most of them, of course, only do come once.

KNOCK. Really ?

MADAME PARPALAID. Yes.

Doctor Parpalaid begins to look rather vaguely about him.

KNOCK. But what about the regular patients ?

MADAME PARPALAID. Regular patients ?

KNOCK. Those that you'll see two or three times a week . . . well, two or three times a month ?

MADAME PARPALAID. My dear . . . d'you hear that ? Patients who come calling like the butcher and the baker ! Oh, my dear Doctor Knock, when you've had a little more experience . . . !

PARPALAID (*laying his hand ever so kindly on Knock's arm*). No, but believe me . . . you'll find this the very best type of practice. For it leaves you so free.

KNOCK. Evidently !

PARPALAID. Let me explain. Patients . . . if you don't know from one day to another whether they'll get well or not . . . why, when they do, it upsets all your calculations. And you feel the loss of them. But when every visit's unexpected . . . every visit is a gain. And you're master of your time.

KNOCK. I see. What I really should have brought with me is a fishing-rod. No doubt I can buy one. Well, the situation is now . . . crystal clear. My dear Doctor Parpalaid, you have sold me . . . for some four thousand francs, which I still owe you . . . a practice which I may liken to your motor-car here. At nineteen francs it would not be dear . . . at twenty-five it would. Come, I'll be reckless . . . I'll give you thirty for it.

PARPALAID. Thirty francs . . . for my Panhard. I wouldn't sell it for six thousand.

KNOCK. (*much dashed !*) I feared not. I can't have it ?

PARPALAID. I'll consider any reasonable offer.

KNOCK. It's a pity. I'm a bit of a carpenter. The body would make a good wardrobe. But keep it, my dear doctor, with my blessing. And I'd say the same for your practice if I still could.

PARPALAID. Now as to that, my good sir . . . you are mistaken.

KNOCK. Don't apologise. I'm not grumbling. I've been done. I've only myself to blame.

MADAME PARPALAID. Done ! My dear, you really cannot let yourself be spoken to like that.

PARPALAID. No . . . I merely wish to convince our friend that he is mistaken.

KNOCK. And pay you every quarter and wait for a year for the patients to pay me . . . how's that to be managed ? But you're not to worry about me. I detest being in debt. Still, after all, one might have worse things to put up with . . . lumbago . . . why, a trick of biting one's tongue is more painful.

MADAME PARPALAID. What ? You don't intend to pay us ? But you've agreed to.

KNOCK. My dear madam, I shall be most anxious to pay you. But lying awake at night won't bring Michaelmas any nearer, will it ?

PARPALAID. But you've money of your own ?

KNOCK. Not a penny. I live on what I earn. At least, the sooner I can begin to the better. And what really vexes me is that I had . . . and I

have . . . a new and original idea for improving this practice. But one can't improve what doesn't exist. However . . . there are more ways than one, perhaps. . . .

PARPALAID. Certainly. You mustn't sit down under a little disappointment, which, believe me, my dear sir, only springs from your inexperience. A doctor's calling can be made a most lucrative one . . . in time . . . all in good time. You're young . . . you're young.

KNOCK. I'm forty.

PARPALAID. Still . . . this is your first practice.

KNOCK. Not quite.

PARPALAID. But you told me you took your degree only last year.

KNOCK. That is so. And my essay entitled "The common misuse of the word Cure in Medicine" had an honourable mention. It began with a quotation . . . as I think . . . from the works of Claude Bernard. "Do you tell me you feel well, Sir? That only means you don't know you're ill."

PARPALAID. Then we're agreed. . . .

KNOCK. Upon that?

PARPALAID. . . . your experience still lies ahead of you.

KNOCK. Not at all. I began practising twenty years ago.

PARPALAID. Without a degree? And where, may I ask?

KNOCK. Not hidden away, sir, in any little

provincial hole. My first practice may be said to have extended over some four thousand miles.

PARPALAID. I don't in the least understand you.

KNOCK. It's quite simple. I took my University degree with honours in Ancient History . . . and a year later I was earning my living selling shirts at the Bon Marché.

PARPALAID. In Paris ?

KNOCK. Ah, no ! Only at Marseilles. Even so I lost the situation. Then, walking one day near the harbour I saw stuck up : " Wanted at once upon a ship bound for India, a surgeon . . . partly qualified." What would you have done ?

PARPALAID. I ? Nothing !

KNOCK. Yes . . . but there are doctors, who, like poets, are born, not made. I went in. I detest pretence. I said : " Gentlemen, how easy for me to tell you I am a doctor ! I am not a doctor, I have not even failed, gentlemen, to pass my examinations, for I have not tried." They thanked me for my candour. Nevertheless, I told them, out of mere respect for the profession I should insist upon being addressed as doctor on board. They thought that most desirable. I took ten minutes more telling them how and why I had overcome the temptation not to apply for this post of doctor as I wasn't a doctor . . . till it only left two, I found, for settling my pay. They were in a hurry. But two minutes sufficed.

PARPALAID. And you were totally ignorant of . . . !

KNOCK. Ah, now we come to it. From my

earliest childhood, from the moment I could read, the advertisements of patent medicines in the papers had a strange fascination for me . . . and more, even more, the " Directions for Use " wrapped round the bottles of pills and powders my father and mother used to buy. When I was nine I knew by heart the whole long history of Mr. Fellows and his Syrup of Hypophosphites. And at this moment I could repeat to you a letter . . . an admirable letter . . . written in 1892 by Mrs. Ephraim B. Studding of Monkville, Pa., to Dr. Williams, whose Pink Pills for Pale People had, after years of suffering, completely cured her of . . . ! Shall I ?

PARPALAID. No . . . no, thank you.

KNOCK. Literature like this gave me the professional touch. And, better, it showed me what the true aim of the doctor . . . what the true end of all medical knowledge should be . . . which recognised teaching nowadays, sir, loses and buries in mere scientific rubbish-heaps. By the time I was twelve I was a doctor at heart . . . qualified by instinct, fully qualified. And it is on this training that my present methods of practice are built.

PARPALAID. And would you be so kind as to tell me what they are ?

KNOCK. No . . . I don't advertise. After all, it's the results that count. You are handing me over to-day . . . by your own admission . . . a practice without patients.

PARPALAID. I admit nothing of the sort.

KNOCK. Come back in a year . . . and see what you'll see ! And the less I start with . . . thanks to you ! . . . the greater the credit.

JEAN. Sir . . . st ! . . . sir. (*Doctor Parpalaid goes over to him.*) I'm afraid I'll have to take that carburetter down.

PARPALAID. Very well . . . very well ! If we're going on with our talk he may as well give his carburetter its usual monthly cleaning, I tell him.

MADAME PARPALAID. But what did you do on that ship ?

KNOCK. I spent two days, Madame, and two sleepless nights making my plans. The six months' trial I gave them showed me how well they worked. And that, after all, is how hospitals are run. By trial and error.

MADAME PARPALAID. Had you many people to look after ?

KNOCK. The crew and seven passengers . . . not very first-class passengers. Thirty-five all told.

MADAME PARPALAID. And enough, too.

PARPALAID. How many died ?

KNOCK. None. I do not approve of patients dying. I am a firm believer in the checking of the death-rate.

PARPALAID. As we all are, I trust.

KNOCK. Are you ? I shouldn't have thought it. No, whatever the difficulties, whatever the temptation, leave nothing untried by which these sufferers may be preserved to us.

MADAME PARPALAID. I do think there is something in that.

PARPALAID. And how many patients had you on board ?

KNOCK. Thirty-five.

PARPALAID. What . . . the whole crew . . . and all the passengers ?

KNOCK. The whole crew . . . and all the passengers.

MADAME PARPALAID. But how did the ship manage ?

KNOCK. Oh . . . everyone took it in turns.

Silence falls for a moment.

PARPALAID. But tell me . . . you are really a doctor now ? Because here one has to be. It'd mean a lot of trouble. If you're not, better say so at once.

KNOCK. I am now really and truly and most professionally a doctor. When I'd proved to myself that my methods were the right methods there was only one thing I wanted . . . a chance to apply them on dry land . . . and broadcast, broadcast ! And naturally I knew that taking a degree was a needful formality.

MADAME PARPALAID. But you told us that you only quite recently . . .

KNOCK. Yes, I couldn't go straight ahead. I had my living to earn. I traded for some years in monkey nuts.

MADAME PARPALAID. Monkey nuts.

KNOCK. Otherwise called peanuts, groundnuts, hognuts . . . properly called Arachis Hypogea. No . . . I didn't go round with a barrow. I

organised a depôt where the costermongers could buy them. And if I'd stuck to it ten years I'd have been a millionaire. But it bored me. Ah, my dear madam . . . there are few callings in which boredom does not lurk . . . as I've found to my cost. Yes, I think medicine, politics, high finance and the Church are the only ones I've not tried.

MADAME PARPALAID. And these medical methods you speak of . . . do you mean to try them here ?

KNOCK. If I felt I couldn't, I should . . . as the homely phrase has it . . . cut my sticks, and you'd never see me again. Naturally, I'd prefer a good town practice. . . .

MADAME PARPALAID (*to Parpalaid*). As you're going to Lyon yourself, my dear, you might as well ask Doctor Knock what these methods are. No harm done.

PARPALAID. Doctor Knock doesn't seem very anxious to tell me.

KNOCK. Here's an offer. Instead of paying you for the practice . . . God knows when ! . . . in money, I'll pay you in kind right away. Work with me for a week and I'll show you how I do it.

PARPALAID. Well, really ! It's likelier that in a week's time you'll be writing to ask me how I did it.

KNOCK. Oh, I won't wait till then. There are one or two things you might tell me here and now.

PARPALAID. Ask away.

KNOCK. Has St. Maurice a crier ?

PARPALAID. Do you mean a town crier ?

KNOCK. I mean a town crier.

PARPALAID. Yes. He cries the lost dogs . . . and if anyone has missed their purse . . . or a sale of old furniture . . . and he does odd jobs for the Mayor.

KNOCK. Good. What's the population ?

PARPALAID. Three thousand five hundred, perhaps . . . six thousand if you count the two villages beyond.

KNOCK. And in the whole district ?

PARPALAID. More than double.

KNOCK. Poor people mostly ?

MADAME PARPALAID. Not at all. Many of them well off . . . and some of them quite well off. There are some very big farms . . . and lots of them own land.

PARPALAID. But stingy . . . stingy !

KNOCK. Manufactures ?

PARPALAID. No.

KNOCK. Much trade ?

MADAME PARPALAID. There are shops enough.

KNOCK. Are the shopkeepers keen ?

PARPALAID. What on ? Oh, on selling things ! No. They make a little extra by it . . . and it passes the time.

MADAME PARPALAID. And while the wife keeps the shop, the husband can go about a bit.

PARPALAID. Or the other way on.

MADAME PARPALAID. Not so often the other way

on. But, after all, where have the women to go? The men have fishing and rabbits to shoot . . . and they play skittles . . . and in winter there's the café.

KNOCK. Are the women religious?

Doctor Parpalaid laughs.

KNOCK. It's a most important question, I assure you.

MADAME PARPALAID. They go to Church.

KNOCK. But do they think about God a lot?

MADAME PARPALAID. Oh, dear me, no!

KNOCK. Good. And how about vice?

PARPALAID. Vice! What sort of vice?

KNOCK. Drug-taking, fornication, blasphemies, political aberrations?

PARPALAID. I fail to see any connection whatever between . . .! Drug-taking . . . no, hardly any. Politics . . . the usual thing.

KNOCK. No one who'd go to the stake for the Single Tax or the Capital Levy . . . or send you there?

PARPALAID. Thank goodness, no.

KNOCK. Much adultery?

PARPALAID. What!

KNOCK. Would you say that conjugal infidelity was more epidemic or endemic . . . and in which category does it prevail?

PARPALAID. You really do ask the most amazing questions! Here, as elsewhere, there may be a few husbands whose wives are no better than they should be. But not more than elsewhere.

MADAME PARPALAID. Less. What chance have they ? The way people spy on you !

KNOCK. Good. Nothing else to tell me ? No queer religions, superstitions, Orders of Druids, and such-like ?

MADAME PARPALAID. I did know some ladies very taken up with spiritualism.

KNOCK. Aha !

MADAME PARPALAID. They used to meet at the Notary's . . . in her drawing-room . . . and do table-rapping.

KNOCK. Horrid habit ! Most degrading !

MADAME PARPALAID. But that's over.

KNOCK. So much the better. And no old herb women . . . no white witches ?

Jean, at intervals, is now cranking at the car. At each failure to make any effect upon it, he stops for breath and mops his forehead.

PARPALAID. Once upon a time may be. But that's all done with.

KNOCK. Then the reign of medical science can begin.

Knock is showing indeed some signs of excitement, rubbing his hands, pacing up and down.

KNOCK. Would it, my dear sir, be too cruel to ask this venerable vehicle to make one more effort to carry us to our destination ? I can't tell you how anxious I am to get there.

MADAME PARPALAID. This is very sudden.

KNOCK. Can't we make a move ?

PARPALAID. But what's the attraction . . . now ?

Knock takes a turn or two without answering. Then . . .

KNOCK. My good Doctor Parpalaid. . . I am strongly convinced that at St. Maurice you have made a mess of a most magnificent opportunity. You should be leaving with your pockets full of gold . . . you should be bulging behind and before with banknotes and bonds. And you, my dear madam, with three rows of pearls round your neck, rolling off in a two-hundred-thousand-franc limousine . . . and not in this Noah's Ark.

MADAME PARPALAID. Are you joking, Dr. Knock ?

KNOCK. It is not a matter for joking, Madame.

MADAME PARPALAID. But how dreadful ! Alfred . . . do you hear ?

PARPALAID. My dear ! Dr. Knock . . . He will forgive my saying so . . . is something of a visionary. And such rushing to extremes may denote, I think, incipient paranoia. A minute ago the practice wasn't worth twopence. Now, it's a gold mine.

MADAME PARPALAID (*her mind not upon Dr. Knock at all*). But, you know, you never would listen to reason. And haven't I said again and again we could have done so much better at St. Maurice if only we'd set about it the right way ?

PARPALAID. Very well, very well ! I shall be back three months hence for my first instalment . . . and then we'll see.

KNOCK. Then you shall see. Can't we get along now ?

PARPALAID (*to Jean*). Are you ready ?

JEAN (*in his ear*). Oh, I'm ready enough. But how we're ever going to start her up again. . . .

PARPALAID. Why ever not ?

JEAN. It'll take a bit of doing. . . .

PARPALAID. We must give a push behind. . . .

JEAN. Maybe !

PARPALAID. We've twenty yards on the flat. I'll drive . . . and you push.

JEAN. Me ?

PARPALAID. And when she's well started . . . just jump on. Now, my dear, get in. Get in, my dear Doctor. I'll drive a little now. And Jean . . . who's a perfect Hercules . . . is just going to show us how the car can be set in motion without any cranking at all. A sort of self-starter . . . though in place of electricity we have the human muscle. Though that again stands for a sort of electricity or magnetism, does it not ? Now ! Now, then !

Dr. Parpalaid sits to the steering wheel. And Jean wedges himself behind the car and begins to push.

ACT II

ACT II

We are in Doctor Parpalaid's old consulting-room, which Knock has already begun to re-equip with up-to-date medical apparatus; its steel and enamel shining against the furniture. On the walls hang some charts and discreetly anatomical diagrams. In particular there is a blackboard. At the back, through curtained glass doors, the waiting-room with its benches, empty at present, can be seen. In the middle of the room is a table at which Knock himself is busy writing. The Town Crier has just come in and stands cap in hand. Knock looks up.

KNOCK. Oh, yes . . . you're the Town Crier.

THE CRIER. Yes, Mr. Knock.

KNOCK. Doctor Knock.

THE CRIER. Doctor Knock.

KNOCK. When I speak to you, please answer "Yes, Doctor" or "No, Doctor." And when you talk of me say "The Doctor did this," or "The Doctor said so and so." It's a thing I'm particular about. How did you all speak of Doctor Parpalaid?

THE CRIER. Oh . . . all right. Not much in him . . . but he was a good sort.

KNOCK. That's not what I asked you. Didn't you call him "Doctor"?

THE CRIER. Well . . . we did and we didn't.

KNOCK. But there wasn't much in him, you thought.

THE CRIER. I didn't. Some did.

KNOCK. Why?

THE CRIER. Why . . . you'd come here to see him . . . and nine times out of ten he'd say, "Be off with you," he'd say . . . "there's nothing wrong with you . . . you'll be all right to-morrow," he'd say.

KNOCK. Really.

THE CRIER. And half the time he'd not be listening to what you told him. "Yes, yes, yes . . ." that's all you'd get out of him. And then he'd start talking of his motor-car.

KNOCK. Which wasn't what you came for?

THE CRIER. Or he'd tell you to take some two-penny remedy. Drink a glass of hot water first thing in the morning . . . or a cup o' camomile when you went to bed. Now, when a man pays eight francs for his doctor he does like his physic to cost something. No, I'm not such a fool, am I, that I can't drink a glass of water . . . if I'd happen to want it.

KNOCK. Well . . . I'm sorry to hear all that. But I wanted to ask you something. What did you charge Dr. Parpalaid when he employed you professionally?

THE CRIER (*grimly*). He never did.

KNOCK. What . . . in all the thirty years he was here ?

THE CRIER. Not once.

KNOCK. Oh, you must have forgotten. Well . . . what do you charge ?

THE CRIER. Three francs for a half round . . . and five francs for the whole round. You may call that dear. But it takes doing . . . to do it well. And if ever you want a round cried, Mr. . . .

KNOCK. Doctor !

THE CRIER. Doctor ! . . . if the extra two francs is not a great matter to you . . . it's worth it for the whole round.

KNOCK. What's the difference ?

THE CRIER. With the half round I cry you five times. In front of the Town Hall, in front of the Post Office, in front of the Hotel Dauphin, at Gallows' Gate and at the corner of the Market. But with the whole round I cry you eleven times. I cry you in front of the . . .

KNOCK. Good. I'll take the whole round. Are you free this morning ?

THE CRIER. This minute.

KNOCK. Very good. Here's what I want you to cry.

He hands him the document he has been writing. The Crier surveys it.

THE CRIER. Handwritings of all sorts, as you may say, aren't much mystery to me. But you might read it me through just once.

KNOCK (*reading*). Dr. Knock, who has now taken

over Dr. Parpalaid's practice, presents his compliments to the inhabitants of St. Maurice, and begs to inform them that in the public interest, and with the hope of checking the alarming increase of those diseases which for the last few years have been spreading through this once healthy district . . .

THE CRIER. That's true . . . so they have.

KNOCK. . . . he will give from nine-thirty to eleven-thirty every Monday morning free consultation and advice to the aforesaid inhabitants of St. Maurice. To strangers the charge will be eight francs as usual.

The Crier, much impressed, takes the paper.

THE CRIER. That's a great scheme. They'll think a lot of that. "In the public interest." But of course it is. Have you forgotten, though, that it's Monday to-day? If I cry that now they'll all be at you before you can turn round.

KNOCK. D'you think so?

THE CRIER. And Monday's market day, what's more . . . ah, you hadn't thought of that. Why, half the countryside's here on a Monday. When they've heard me cry this . . . you won't have room for them.

KNOCK. I'll manage.

THE CRIER. But there's another thing. It's market days when the patients do come. Market days were when Parpalaid had his . . . when he had any. So if you're going to see them free, gratis. . . .

KNOCK. My good man, what I want you to grasp is this. The health of the people must be watched over. Nothing is more important. If I wanted to make money I should be in Paris . . . or New York.

THE CRIER. Ah, you put your finger on it, you do! We don't take care of ourselves as we ought. We don't go easy as we ought . . . we're always working. And the worse we feel the harder we go. Beasts of burden we might be.

KNOCK. You're a man that thinks for himself, I see.

THE CRIER. I do. I've not had the education of some. But there is some I can teach a thing or so to for all that. You ask the Mayor. Why, one day, Mr. Knock . . .

KNOCK. Dr. Knock.

THE CRIER. . . . Dr. Knock. Why, one day, Doctor, the Prefect himself was at our Town Hall here . . . and ask any of the gentlemen present if it's not true . . . ask the Deputy Mayor . . . ask the Town Clerk. And there was I, as it might be now . . .

KNOCK. And the Prefect saw at a glance the sort of a man you were . . . and that here was a Town Crier that knew a thing or two more than many a man that wasn't a Town Crier knew . . . for all they might think themselves more knowing than any Town Crier in the country. And who was it had no answer to make to that? The Mayor.

THE CRIER (*highly delighted*). That's true . . . every word! Why, you might have been there.

KNOCK. I wasn't.

THE CRIER. Then someone must have told you.

Knock smiles a diplomatic denial.

THE CRIER. Then you've been talking to the Prefect.

Knock makes a non-committal gesture.

KNOCK. Well . . . I rely on you. And don't waste time about it, will you?

THE CRIER. No . . . no. (*Then with some little diffidence*) But if I don't come back till I've done . . . why, I'll be too late. So d'you think, pr'aps, you'd be so kind as to see me now?

KNOCK. What? Well, well, well . . . we must be quick about it. I've appointments with Monsieur Bernard, the schoolmaster, and with Monsieur Mousquet, the chemist . . . and I must get through with them before the patients begin. What's wrong with you?

THE CRIER. I must think. I know! When I've had my dinner I'll sometimes get a sort of a feeling . . . yes, a kind of a feeling here. (*He plants a finger somewhere about the middle of his person.*) A sort of a tickling . . . or a scratchelling.

Knock puts on an air of the greatest concentration.

KNOCK. Wait. Let's be clear about this. Does it scratch . . . or does it tickle?

THE CRIER. Scratch. Well . . . sometimes it tickles too.

KNOCK. Show me the exact spot.

THE CRIER. There.

KNOCK. There? Or there?

THE CRIER. There. Well . . . it might be there. Between the two.

KNOCK. Quite so . . . between the two. I wonder if it's not a thought to the left . . . where my finger is now.

THE CRIER. I believe it may be.

KNOCK. Hurt you when I press . . . so?

THE CRIER. Yes . . . it sort of hurts.

KNOCK. Ah! Now do you feel that tickling, as you call it, more than usual when you've been eating venison?

THE CRIER. I don't ever eat venison. But if I did . . . I believe I would.

KNOCK. Ah! Ah! That's most important. How old are you?

THE CRIER. Fifty-one. Fifty-two next year.

KNOCK. Nearer fifty-two than fifty-one?

THE CRIER. Yes . . . I am.

Apprehension is growing on him. His eyes are rounder, his jaw is loosening a little. Knock is kindly, but severe.

KNOCK. Well, my friend . . . well . . . well! You can work to-day as usual. Go to bed early. To-morrow . . . stop in bed, I'll come and see you. I shan't charge you anything. But don't go telling people that now.

THE CRIER. Thank you, Doctor . . . thank you

. . . very kind. But . . . is it something serious that's wrong ?

KNOCK. No . . . no . . . we won't call it serious . . . yet. We're taking it in time . . . just in time. Do you smoke ?

THE CRIER. I chew.

KNOCK. Stop it. Do you drink ?

THE CRIER. The usual.

KNOCK. Not a drop. Are you married ?

THE CRIER. Yes.

KNOCK. Forget it.

The Crier wipes the sweat from his brow.

THE CRIER. Can I eat anything ?

KNOCK. Well, as you'll be working to-day you can take a little soup. To-morrow we'll see what we can really cut you off. Till then . . . do as I've told you.

THE CRIER. Doctor . . . you don't p'raps think I'd better go to bed at once, do you ? I don't feel at all well.

KNOCK. No, no ! Not on any account. In a case like yours one must never, never be in bed between sunrise and sunset. You go your rounds as if nothing had happened . . . and wait till to-night.

Distracted, but docile, the Crier departs. In the waiting-room stands Monsieur Bernard, the schoolmaster. He is a meek and rather nervous man. Knock ushers him into the consulting-room and they bow ceremoniously.

KNOCK. Good morning, Monsieur Bernard, good morning. I hope this is not an inconvenient time for you ?

BERNARD. No, Doctor, no. I've a minute or two. My assistant is there. It's the play interval.

KNOCK. But I was very anxious for a talk with you. We have so many mutual interests . . . and such important ones . . . and I am not the man, believe me, to wish to weaken the excellent understanding that existed between you and my predecessor.

BERNARD. The understanding . . . ?

KNOCK. Nor am I the sort, you'll find, that wants it all his own way . . . upsets things for the sake of upsetting them. No. It's your advice I need to begin with.

BERNARD. I'm afraid I don't quite see . . .

KNOCK. Let us leave things for the moment as they are . . . and later improve them if we can.

BERNARD. But . . .

KNOCK. Over sending things to the local papers . . . over lectures, even in our talks together . . . I'll take my cue from you . . . I'll fit my time to yours.

BERNARD. I fear I don't in the least understand what you are talking about.

KNOCK. I only want to assure you that as far as I am concerned our association from the very beginning shall be a fruitful one.

BERNARD (*utterly, hopelessly fogged*). I'm afraid I'm very stupid.

KNOCK. My dear sir . . . your association with Dr. Parpalaid was naturally a very close one. . . .

BERNARD. I used to meet him sometimes at the Café. We played billiards now and then.

KNOCK. No, no, no, no . . . not that sort of association.

BERNARD. I don't know of any other.

KNOCK. But, my dear sir . . . however did you set about teaching people here the laws of health . . . setting up the right standards of household hygiene . . . of . . . good heavens ! . . . the hundred and one things a doctor and a schoolmaster can only do if they do them together ?

BERNARD. We didn't set about them at all.

KNOCK. You preferred each to work at it your own way.

BERNARD. No, not our own way . . . nor any way. We never gave the matter a thought . . . either of us. Nor has anyone else in the place that I've ever known of.

Knock stares at him ; amazed, you would say, quite overcome.

KNOCK. If I had not heard that from your own lips I'd never have believed it.

A painful silence falls, Monsieur Bernard breaks it apologetically.

BERNARD. I'm sorry to disappoint you. But it wasn't quite my place to begin such a thing . . . even if I'd ever thought of it . . . even if the school work left me time.

KNOCK. No, no! You waited for the call. It never came.

BERNARD. Oh . . . whenever I've been asked to do anything I've been only too anxious. . . .

KNOCK. Monsieur Bernard, I am sure of it.

Another silence falls. Then Knock's indignation overwhelms him.

KNOCK. Good God! To think of those wretched people left to their own devices . . . hygienically . . . prophylactically!

BERNARD. They certainly are.

KNOCK. I'll wager they drink the water here, and give never a thought to the billions of bacteria in each mouthful.

BERNARD. No, I'm sure they don't.

KNOCK. Do you suppose they even know what a microbe is?

BERNARD. I doubt it. Some of them have heard the word. But I expect they think it's a sort of fly.

KNOCK. Terrible! Terrible! Well, my dear Monsieur Bernard . . . it'll naturally take a little time now to destroy this Fool's Paradise. But we must do our best . . . you and I. We must do our best.

BERNARD. Oh, I'm quite willing. I only fear I shan't be of much help.

KNOCK. Monsieur Bernard . . . somebody who knows you very well tells me you have one serious fault. You're too modest. You are the only person apparently who is not aware of the moral

authority you wield . . . and what a quite extraordinary personal influence you have. Forgive a mere stranger for putting it so bluntly. But I'm told that nothing of any importance gets done in this town without you.

BERNARD (*his face wreathing into timid smiles*). Oh, my dear Doctor . . . !

KNOCK. But it's so ! Now, I can treat my patients . . . true ! But the disease itself . . . who'll help fight that and eradicate that if you don't ? Who but you can tell these poor ignorant people of the dangers that besiege them every minute of the day . . . can teach them at least that it's no use waiting till they're dead to call in the doctor ?

BERNARD. They are very careless. I don't deny that.

KNOCK. Well . . . let's begin at the beginning. I have here the material for several popular lectures . . . very full notes, good pictures . . . and I've a magic lantern. You, of course, are an accomplished speaker. But, for a start . . . here's one all written out . . . most interesting, quite entertaining . . . on typhoid fever. The various unexpected forms it takes. The many media by which it may invade the system . . . water, bread, milk, shellfish, vegetables of all sorts, watercress, dust, contagious breath, etc., etc. How it may be breeding in you for weeks and months and you'll never know it . . . till, one day . . . Pfth ! The complications that come with it and after it.

And all embellished with the most excellent pictures . . . the bacilli well magnified, specimens of secreta, sections of a diseased gland, of an intestinal perforation. All in colours . . . pink, red, yellow, green . . . you know.

Poor Monsieur Bernard has been showing signs of a most pathetic discomfort.

BERNARD. Really . . . I'm afraid . . . I'm of a rather nervous nature. And if I were to start studying all this . . . d'you know, I shouldn't sleep at night.

KNOCK. But that's what I want . . . that's the idea. Or rather, that's the very sort of shock that I want you to give them all. Oh, y o u'll get used to it. But they mustn't sleep at night. That's what is wrong. They sleep and they sleep . . . lulled in their false security. And when they wake, it's too late. Disease has them by the throat.

BERNARD. But my own health is already by no means what it should be. My father and mother never thought I'd live to grow up. Of course, I know . . . the microbes on the slides . . . are not real microbes. But all the same . . .

KNOCK (*buoyantly*). And if that one doesn't appeal to everybody . . . here's another: "The Germ Carrier." No one need be frightened by this. But it makes it as plain as day, proves by instance upon instance, that a man can go about looking the picture of health, clean tongue, eye bright, appetite excellent, and be carrying in every nook and cranny of his system trillions of germs . . . poisonous

enough to infect a whole county. I have a right to suspect any man I see of being a germ-carrier. You now! What is there to prove to me that you are not?

BERNARD. I . . . me!

KNOCK. Show me the man who'll leave that lecture and crack jokes about it.

BERNARD. Doctor . . . do you really think . . . that I am a germ carrier?

KNOCK. No, not necessarily . . . not you in particular. I merely make an example of you.

Monsieur Bernard is stupent. Knock glances towards the waiting-room, where Mousquet, the chemist, has now established himself.

KNOCK. Ah, there's Monsieur Mousquet. Well, we'll meet again soon. And thank you . . . thank you for being so ready to help me. I was sure you would be . . . I was sure of it.

And Monsieur Bernard finds himself outside, while Monsieur Mousquet takes his place. A foxy and rather a tart little man.

KNOCK. Sit down, my dear Monsieur Mousquet . . . pray sit down. I found time yesterday just to give one glance round your . . . establishment. Well . . . one glance showed me how excellently it is equipped . . . and how admirably you manage it. Everything spick and span and up to date. All that a chemist's shop should be.

MOUSQUET. Doctor, you're too kind.

KNOCK. No, no . . . these things concern me very closely. A physician, I always say, who has not a first-class pharmaceutical chemist to depend on is like a general fighting a battle without guns.

MOUSQUET. I'm glad you give my profession its due.

KNOCK. Still . . . such a high standard of service as you provide must bring its own reward as well. You can't make less than twenty-five thousand francs a year.

MOUSQUET. Profit ? My dear Doctor . . . I wish I made half.

KNOCK. Come, come, Monsieur Mousquet . . . I'm not the income-tax collector. As between friends . ... between colleagues.

MOUSQUET. No reason whatever, Doctor, I shouldn't tell you the truth . . . and this is the truth, I'm sorry to say. It takes me all my time to make ten thousand.

KNOCK. But that's monstrous. Oh . . . I'd have said twenty-five thousand at the very least. You've no competitors ?

MOUSQUET. Not one . . . for ten miles or more.

KNOCK. Enemies ?

MOUSQUET. Not that I know of.

KNOCK (*his voice dropping confidentially*). And there's never been any little accident ? Oh, these things will happen. One's in a hurry . . . the laudanum's where the castor oil ought to be . . . it's done in a moment . . . and the patient's got the bottle !

MOUSQUET. Never . . . never, never. No, believe, me . . . not the slightest mistake made . . . these twenty years.

KNOCK. Then . . . we needn't look further perhaps! . . . was my predecessor not quite up to his work?

MOUSQUET. Well . . . that depends on how you look at it.

KNOCK. Come . . . between ourselves.

MOUSQUET. Dr. Parpalaid was a most worthy man. Personally, we couldn't have got on better . . .

KNOCK. But if you'd bound up his prescriptions at the year's end they wouldn't have made a very big book I suppose?

MOUSQUET. You've hit it.

KNOCK. Then I ask myself . . . putting together all I've heard about him so far . . . did he really believe in the science of medicine?

MOUSQUET. I did my best . . . I always did the right thing by him. If customers had anything out of the way the matter with them I'd send them on to him. Did I ever see them again? No.

KNOCK. I really cannot tell you how it distresses me to hear things like this. My dear Monsieur Mousquet . . . our calling, yours and mine, ranks second to none in the world. How shameful to let it sink bit by bit from that high place of prosperity and influence to which our predecessors have raised it! It's a sort of treason.

MOUSQUET. Yes, it is. And setting the money question aside, does it seem right, sir, I ask you,

for me to be thought less of than the ironmonger and the grocer? And I assure you that Madame Mousquet can no more afford the hats and stockings that the ironmonger's wife here shows herself off in Sundays and week-days both than . . .

KNOCK. Don't talk of it . . . don't talk of it. You might as well be telling me that the Prime Minister's mother had to take in washing.

MOUSQUET. I wish Madame Mousquet could hear you say so.

KNOCK. We are not here, you and I, to be treated like that in a place like this.

MOUSQUET. We ought not to be.

KNOCK. For, to begin with, every single soul in the place is, ipso facto, a potential patient.

MOUSQUET. That's asking a good deal.

KNOCK. Every single one of them.

MOUSQUET. Yes, I suppose there's nobody that at some time or another doesn't have to look to us . . .

KNOCK. It should be all the time.

MOUSQUET. But he has to fall ill.

KNOCK. "Fall ill!" That is a phrase, Monsieur Mousquet, that modern science has made meaningless. Health is a mere word . . . and a word we'd do far better to take out of the dictionary. I only see around me people suffering more or less acutely from diseases more or less serious, which more or less rapidly get the better of them. Of course, if you go telling them they're quite well they're glad enough to believe it. But you tell

them what is not true. And your only excuse for doing it is if you have so many patients on your hands already that you can't attend to any more.

MOUSQUET. That seems a very sound theory.

KNOCK. It is simply the modern scientific view of the matter. Think it over. Why . . . we compel every citizen to defend his country. On the very same principle we should force him . . . whether he likes it or not . . . to fight against disease.

MOUSQUET. You're a man of ideas, Doctor . . . I can see that. And people who haven't any may say what they like . . . it's ideas that count.

Knock gets up: Mousquet, too, to take his leave.

KNOCK. Listen to me. I may be too sanguine. I daresay there are disappointments in store for me. But if, by this time next year, you haven't made that twenty-five thousand francs profit you deserve . . . and if Madame Mousquet hasn't the dresses and hats and silk stockings she simply owes it to her position to have . . . I give you leave to come here and kick me down my own stairs.

MOUSQUET. My dear Doctor . . . if I weren't grateful to you for what you say, I'd be a fool . . . and I'd be a scoundrel if I didn't help you in every possible way.

KNOCK. I rely on you. And you may on me.

They part on the best terms with each other and with themselves. Patients have gathered in the waiting-room by now.

Knock goes out among them and can be heard speaking to some unseen attendant.

KNOCK. My patients. A dozen of them already. Well . . . if any more come you'd better warn them that after eleven-thirty I really can see no more . . . at least I can't see them gratuitously. Are you the first, Madame ?

This is a farmer's wife, middle-aged, in black and of a very operculous countenance and habit of body. She carries her morning's purchases, a basketful, besides a new saucepan and one other more mysteriously shaped package, and is reluctant to let them go.

KNOCK. You do belong to the district ?

FARMER'S WIFE. I do.

KNOCK. To St. Maurice ?

FARMER'S WIFE. The big farm on the road to Luchère.

KNOCK. Is it your own ?

FARMER'S WIFE. Mine and my husband's.

KNOCK. A farm like that now . . . means a lot of work.

FARMER'S WIFE. It does. Eighteen cows, the bull, the fat stock. There's a mare in foal . . . we've goats and a dozen pigs . . . and then there's the poultry.

KNOCK. And no one to help you ?

FARMER'S WIFE. Why, of course ! Three men . . . and a girl in the house. And more for the hay and the harvest.

KNOCK. Dear me . . . dear me. But it doesn't leave you much time to look after yourself.

FARMER'S WIFE. No, indeed.

KNOCK. And you feel ill ?

FARMER'S WIFE. No, I don't. But I get blown.

KNOCK. Blown ? Blown ! Show me your tongue. H'm. Not much appetite ?

FARMER'S WIFE. No.

KNOCK. What do you eat mostly ?

FARMER'S WIFE. Meat.

The examination proceeds with the usual formalities.

KNOCK. Bend over. Breathe. Breathe. Cough. Cough again. Did you ever fall off a ladder when you were young ?

FARMER'S WIFE. I don't remember.

He is still tapping and listening ; and he now gives her a good sharp punch in the small of the back.

KNOCK. Ever feel a pain here . . . at night . . . when you're getting into bed . . . a sort of a cramp ?

FARMER'S WIFE. Yes . . . sometimes.

KNOCK. Now, try and remember. It might have been quite a big ladder.

FARMER'S WIFE. It would have been.

KNOCK. Nine feet high, say . . . and placed against a wall. And you fell backwards . . . plump ! That's where you caught it . . . on the left one . . . luckily.

FARMER'S WIFE. Was it ?

KNOCK. Did you never see Dr. Parpalaid about this ?

FARMER'S WIFE. No.

KNOCK. Why not ?

FARMER'S WIFE. He never saw you for nothing.

Knock finishes his examination, makes her sit down, sits opposite her, turns his shining spectacles full on her. There is a pause.

KNOCK. Do you realise what's wrong with you ?

FARMER'S WIFE. No.

KNOCK. That's as well, perhaps. Now ! You want to be cured . . . or you don't want to be cured.

FARMER'S WIFE. I do.

KNOCK. Let me warn you at once that it will be a very long and a very costly business.

FARMER'S WIFE. Oh ! My gracious ! Why will it ?

KNOCK. Because a trouble that has been going on forty years can't be cured in five minutes.

FARMER'S WIFE. Forty years !

KNOCK. Ever since you fell off that ladder.

FARMER'S WIFE. What's it going to cost me ?

KNOCK. What's a yearling calf worth now ?

FARMER'S WIFE. That depends on the size and the market rate. A good one . . . oh, four or five hundred francs.

KNOCK. And a pig for killing ?

FARMER'S WIFE. Oh . . . a thousand, or more.

KNOCK. Well . . . it'll cost you two pigs and a calf and a half.

FARMER'S WIFE. What . . . what? Three thousand francs! Mother Mary . . . what a thing to happen to me!

KNOCK. Would you sooner try Lourdes? I say nothing against it.

FARMER'S WIFE. That costs a lot too . . . and it's never sure. But how can I have got all that the matter with me?

Knock, with a most obliging air, takes a piece of chalk and goes to the blackboard, upon which he sketches in a masterly fashion.

KNOCK. I can show you in a minute on the blackboard. Here's your spinal cord . . . in section . . . very roughly, of course. This is your Turck's facellum . . . and this is your Clarke's column. Can you follow? Well, when you fell off that ladder your Turck and your Clarke slipped . . . side-slipped . . . like that. (*He demonstrates with the chalk.*) Oh . . . a fiftieth of an inch. That's not much, is it? No, you're quite right. But look at them. What a position! The result is a constant and severe strain upon the multipolaries.

FARMER'S WIFE. Think of that now . . . oh, think of that!

KNOCK. Don't imagine you're going to die of it to-day or to-morrow. We can take our time.

FARMER'S WIFE. And all through falling off that ladder!

KNOCK. It might . . . it might even be better to let the thing alone. Money's hard to get . . . Heaven knows. And when one's old . . . a few years of life, more or less! There's little pleasure in them anyhow.

FARMER'S WIFE. Couldn't you . . . somehow . . . manage to . . . do it a little cheaper? Though I'd want it done properly, mark you, all the same.

KNOCK. I'll tell you what I can do . . . I can keep you under observation for a little. That'll cost next to nothing. Then, at the end of a week, say . . . you'll know yourself how you're feeling . . . worse or better. And then you can make up your mind.

FARMER'S WIFE. That's right! That's right!

KNOCK. Good. Now go back home. Did you drive here?

FARMER'S WIFE. I walked.

He sits to his table and as he talks writes out his directions as well.

KNOCK. Find someone to drive you back. Go to bed when you get there. Is there a room you can be left alone in . . . quite alone? Have the shutters pulled to and the blinds down . . . so that the light won't trouble you. And say you're not to be talked to by anyone . . . not by anyone. Now . . . you'll eat no solids for a week. A glass of Vichy water every two hours. And . . . if you can't do without . . . half a biscuit, not more, soaked in milk . . . warm milk . . . morning and night. And I'd rather you went without the

biscuit . . . if you could. Well . . . that won't cost you much, will it? Then, at the end of the week, we'll see how you are. If you feel quite yourself again . . . spry and ready for anything . . . we shall know that things are less serious than we have reason to suppose . . . and no one will be more pleased than I. But if, on the other hand, you're rather weak, rather run down . . . head swimming a little . . . wanting to stay in bed . . . then we mustn't delay any longer . . . for a course of treatment will most undoubtedly be indicated. So that's understood.

FARMER'S WIFE. I suppose so.

KNOCK. I've written it all down . . . and I'll be round to see you soon.

He takes her to the door, and most considerately out into the waiting-room, where he speaks to the invisible attendant.

KNOCK. Mariette . . . help this lady very carefully down the stairs, please. And get her a cab if you can. Now, Madame . . .

This last is to a lady who has at once detached herself from the now gathering crowd of waiting patients. She is a lady of sixty, dressed rather flowingly in violet. She carries a crutch-handled stick, which seems to lend her an almost royal dignity. Knock bows her into the consulting-room. She begins at once and most categorically, and she is a lady of rapid speech.

THE LADY. Yes, Doctor . . . you may well be surprised to see me.

KNOCK. A little surprised.

THE LADY. When a Madame Pons, that is . . . a Mademoiselle Lempoumas that was . . . comes with all the rest for free treatment . . . somewhat astonishing!

KNOCK. But the greater compliment . . . and I am conscious of it.

MADAME PONS. A pretty upshot, isn't it, of this ghastly state of things . . . a lot of riffraff, a crew of pork-butchers, rolling in their carriages and giving champagne suppers to light ladies . . . while a Demoiselle Lempoumas, whose family dates from the thirteenth century and once owned half the countryside, who is related to everyone of any consequence for miles round, comes to stand in line with the paupers of St. Maurice. Not quite as it should be, I think, Doctor.

KNOCK. By no means, Madame.

MADAME PONS. Well, well . . . I won't pretend my income's what it was . . . or that I still keep my six servants . . . or the four horses in the stable . . . or that things are as they were while my uncle was alive. Only last year I had to sell a three hundred acre estate . . . La Michouille . . . which my grandmother left me. Michouille . . . the word's Græco-Latin originally . . . our parish priest says . . . comes from Mycodium . . . and means mushroom-hating. And it's quite true that not a single mushroom has ever been found

on the place . . . it really is as if the soil did hate them. And what with taxes and repairs it was bringing in next to nothing. Ever since my husband died the tenants . . . needless to say . . . have taken advantage of me . . . worrying, day in and day out, to have something done for them here, or to be let off paying something there . . . till I was weary of the whole thing . . . weary, weary, weary! So don't you agree, Doctor, that, taking everything into account, I was right to get rid of it?

KNOCK (*who has listened with the greatest attention*). Yes, Madame, I do . . . more especially if you were fond of mushrooms . . . and if you invested the money it brought you to advantage.

MADAME PONS. Ah . . . but that's the sore spot! Day and night I ask myself . . . have I done the right thing? And I doubt it . . . I gravely doubt it. I took advice from this idiot of a local lawyer . . . oh, but he's the best of men! I really don't believe, though, that he has as much business sense as his wife's drawing-room table . . . which did rap out an answer or two when the spirits had hold of it. I bought oil shares. Doctor . . . what do you think of oil?

KNOCK. One of the most useful of minerals. As an investment . . . speculative rather . . . apt to rise a little and then fall a lot for no very apparent reason.

MADAME PONS. You make me go cold all over. I believe I bought them when they were . . . right up. Fifty thousand francs' worth. Wasn't

it rather foolish to put all that into oil . . . when one hasn't over much to spare ?

KNOCK. I should think it somewhat unwise to put more than ten per cent of one's capital into oil.

MADAME PONS. Ah, well ! But as long as it's not more than ten per cent . . . why, that's what you'd call not altogether unwise.

KNOCK. By no means.

MADAME PONS. Thank you so much. That relieves my mind . . . it does indeed. You don't know what a worry the managing of my few little pennies is to me. I often tell myself I'd be the better for some other troubles . . . to drive that one away. For we're poor creatures, my dear Doctor. What's the saying ? " Life's a choice of Evils." Well, a change of any sort does one good, I suppose. And I'm thankful enough, I'm sure, not to be bothered by tenants and leases and the like. And I'm too old for adventures . . . of any sort (*the implication is faintly coquettish*). And I don't want to fly round the world. And you're wondering perhaps what I h a v e come for . . . and whatever did induce me to stand in line for a free visit to the doctor ?

KNOCK. Whatever your reasons, Madame, I am sure they were good ones.

MADAME PONS. I wanted to set them all a good example. When I heard what you were doing I said . . . Now, that's magnificent, that's most public-spirited. But I know the people here so

well . . . oh, so well! And I thought to myself . . . No, this is something new . . . and they'll none of them go near him . . . and that's all the thanks he'll get. But then I said to myself . . . if they see that a Madame Pons, a Mademoiselle Lempoumas that was, is not ashamed to pay a free visit to the doctor . . . why, nor will they be. For the least thing I do is remarked upon . . . quite naturally.

KNOCK. A most praiseworthy step to take, Madame . . . and I thank you for it.

So Madame Pons rises to take her leave.

MADAME PONS. Well, then, my dear Doctor, I am most happy to have made your acquaintance. I am at home every afternoon. And a few friends come in. A select little circle . . . a little pleasant talk round a tea-table which my great-great-grandmother sat at in her day. And there will always be a cup on it for you.

Knock bows his thanks. She goes towards the door. Then turns as if at a casual afterthought.

MADAME PONS. But I have been very, very worried . . . first by my tenants and now by these investments. There are whole nights, I do assure you, when I simply cannot sleep. It's most exhausting. I suppose you don't know, Doctor, do you, of any really good cure for sleeplessness?

KNOCK. Have you suffered from insomnia long?

MADAME PONS. Longer than I care to remember.

KNOCK. Did you consult Dr. Parpalaid about it?

MADAME PONS. Often.

KNOCK. What had he to say ?

MADAME PONS. He told me to buy a good Blue Book, or a volume of law reports . . . and to read six pages every night in bed. Oh, he never took the matter seriously at all.

KNOCK. He may have been wrong. I have known cases of insomnia which proved to be of the very gravest import.

MADAME PONS. Really ?

KNOCK. Insomnia, for instance, which was due to some organic disease of the intra-cerebral circulation, that change in the arterial walls which we call atheroma. Your cerebral arteries, Madame, the arteries that feed the brain may . . . it is possible . . . be as hard and brittle as pipe-stems.

MADAME PONS. Pipe-stems !

KNOCK. A common comparison.

MADAME PONS. Heavens ! Would smoking bring that on ? I do smoke a little.

KNOCK. We should have to take that into account. Then again . . . insomnia may come from a constant sapping of the grey matter of the brain by nerves that are diseased.

MADAME PONS. But how dreadful ! Would you please explain that, Doctor ?

KNOCK. Certainly. Try and picture to yourself a sort of crab . . . or a kind of octopus . . . or a very large spider . . . which nibbles at you . . . and sucks at you . . . and little by little drains away all the inside of your head.

Whereat and without more ado the poor lady goes off into hysterics.

MADAME PONS. Oh! Aha! Oho! How terrible! How horrible! Yes, that's what's the matter. I know it! I knew it! Oh, Doctor, Doctor, I'd rather die at once . . . I'd sooner you killed me. I'm going to faint . . . No, I'm not. But the pain's coming on. Hadn't you better give me a little morphia . . . hadn't you? Doctor . . . what can you do for me? I cannot face it . . . I simply cannot face it. But I'd rather know . . . I'd sooner be told straight out. Is it absolutely fatal?

KNOCK. No.

MADAME PONS. Can it be cured?

KNOCK. In time.

MADAME PONS. You're not deceiving me? I'd rather know the worst. I'll be brave.

KNOCK. If you're ready to go through with the treatment steadily and patiently.

MADAME PONS. Which is it you can cure . . . the thing that's like a pipe-stem, or the spider? It's the spider I've got . . . I know!

KNOCK. Either can be cured. Not that I'd dare say that to an ordinary patient . . . who'd have neither the time nor the means for it. But with you, of course. . . !

MADAME PONS. Oh, I'll be a perfect patient, Doctor . . . I'll be most biddable. There's nothing I won't do . . . nothing I won't suffer . . . as long as it's not too painful.

KNOCK. There'll be nothing painful about it. Radium . . . or strictly speaking radio-activity, is the curative agent employed. The only thing is that one must persevere with the cure . . . for two or three years if need be. And one must have a conscientious medical man at hand who will control the modus operandi with the utmost care, and calculate the radio-active applications with the greatest nicety . . . and, in fact, see you nearly every day.

MADAME PONS. Oh . . . I'll persevere. But it's you, Doctor . . . you won't want to give me all that attention.

KNOCK. I'll want to . . . of course I'll want to. There's nothing I'd like better. But can I? That's the trouble. Do you live far away?

MADAME PONS. No . . . in the next street.

KNOCK. Well, well . . . then I can try to run round every morning . . . I'll do my very best to. Not on Sundays, though. And not on Mondays . . . because I must be here.

MADAME PONS. But two days running . . . won't that be too long to go? No treatment at all from Saturday to Tuesday?

KNOCK. Yes . . . well! We must try leaving you very careful directions. And I shall run in when I can . . . if not Sunday morning . . . Monday afternoon.

MADAME PONS. Oh . . . please, please! But oughtn't I to do something at once?

KNOCK. Go straight home . . . and stay in your

own room. I'll call to-morrow morning and examine you . . . thoroughly.

MADAME PONS. But won't you give me something to take . . . in case. . . . ?

KNOCK. Ah . . . yes. Do you pass the chemist's? Ask Monsieur Mousquet if he'll be good enough to make that up as soon as possible.

And, having written Monsieur Mousquet his first prescription, he bows Madame Pons to the door. The waiting-room is now full, and Knock looks around him with some severity.

KNOCK. Mariette . . . Mariette! What are all these people waiting for? The free visits finish at half-past eleven. Don't they know that?

MARIETTE'S VOICE. I've told them. But they say they'd rather stop.

KNOCK. Who's first then?

Two countrymen come forward together. They are the picture of health. Knock surveys them. They stand there in sheepish mischief, struggling with ill-suppressed giggles, encouraging each other with a nudge and a wink. The crowd must be in the joke, too, by the look of it, by the chuckling which turns, as Knock stands there, to an apologetic cough or so. But he takes no notice.

KNOCK. Well . . . which of you?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Both of us.

KNOCK. You don't want to see me together.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Both together.

This last remark has a great success in the waiting-room.

KNOCK. I don't see patients two at a time. Settle it between you. Besides, you weren't here just now, were you? There are others before you.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. They've give us their turn. You ask them. They've give it us.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. Give it us both . . . him and me . . . we're sort of twins.

The waiting-room is enjoying it thoroughly. Knock pauses. But suddenly he makes up his mind, ushers them in and shuts the door sharply. The interview which follows resolves itself more into action than talk. Knock's phrases are very curt indeed, and he goes about his business in an almost military way. For the first few moments the pseudo-patients enjoy their joke greatly; then, somehow, it begins to pall.

KNOCK. Come in. (*To the first*) Undress. (*To the second*) You . . . sit there.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Altogether?

KNOCK. Take your shirt off. That'll do.

Knock then, as one may say, "goes over" him pretty completely. Tongue, teeth, eyes, eyelids. Then he takes an illuminated laryngoscope and flashes it, first, to his alarm, in the fellow's face and next, to his great discomfort, into the

depths of his throat. Then he points to the examination couch.

KNOCK. Lie down there. Put your knees down.

And then an even worse ordeal begins, soundings, tappings, and pinchings of the most expert and scientific sort. Knock's face is gravity itself, and his patient's comes to match it. So does the companion's. The silence is broken but once by the Doctor's short "Put your arm up." Then it settles heavily till the examination ends.

KNOCK. That'll do. Dress yourself.

Silence again while he does so. Knock is in an attitude of scientific detachment, is he? He gives a glance at his finger-nails. He takes a paper from his table and puts it down again. Heaven knows what he is thinking of. Then suddenly he asks . . .

KNOCK. Father alive?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Dead.

KNOCK. Die suddenly?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Yes.

KNOCK. Thought so. Wasn't an old man?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Forty-nine.

KNOCK. So much!

Another silence. This little exchange has spread a deep discomfort through the room. Then Knock takes up a sheaf of large coloured anatomical designs which he shows, one by one. They are of the chief

organs of the human body, and they show, above, man as he should be; below, and very luridly, man as he is when he drinks a very great deal more than is good for him.

KNOCK. I'm going to show you what your inside is like. That represents the kidneys of a healthy man. Your kidneys! Liver of a healthy man. Your liver! Heart of a healthy man. Your heart! No . . . your heart's worse than that.

The depression deepens as the good Doctor quietly puts the pictures away.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN (*meekly*). Perhaps I oughtn't to drink quite so much, Doctor?

KNOCK. It won't make any difference.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Isn't there anything I can take for it?

KNOCK. Hardly worth while. (*To the other*) Now . . . you!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. I'd be very glad to come back again . . . and pay, Doctor.

KNOCK. Quite useless.

His eye is now upon the other fellow, who is cowering on his chair.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. There's nothing the matter with me, Doctor.

KNOCK (*tremendously*). How do you know?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I feel quite well . . . I do indeed.

KNOCK. Then what did you come here for?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. He asked me. . . .

KNOCK. Because he wasn't big enough to come all alone? Undress!

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. No, Doctor, please . . . no, no . . . not to-day! I'll come back . . . some other time, Doctor . . . some other time. . . .

He opens the door and flies. So does his fellow. The waiting-room, it would seem, has been joyfully expectant of the re-emergence of the two protagonists of the joke. But at the sight of them the chuckling stops, an awed hush falls, and Knock watches them depart in silence, through a silent crowd. Then, left alone, he rubs his hands. It is a favourite gesture of his.

ACT III

ACT III

We are in the front hall of St. Maurice's one hotel. It is just what one would expect to find in a small French town—at least, it was once. But a curious change has come over it. It has undergone much scrubbing and all dust-collecting superfluities of furnishing are removed. Certainly there still hang on the walls a few cheery advertisements of liqueurs, a motoring map with a tyre company's name, an effigy superscribed. But, outnumbering and subduing these, we find placards which in harsher, firmer tones tell us of vaccination, of inoculation, of notifiable disease. We are even told to wipe our feet when we come in. In fact, the whole place looks less hotel than hospital; we can almost smell the antiseptic.

It is winter time, for through a window we can see the valley in deep snow. From her kitchen regions comes Madame Rémy, the landlady. Through the front door comes Scipio, the hotel factotum, luggage laden.

MADAME RÉMY. The omnibus come, Scipio ?

SCIPIO. Yes'm.

MADAME RÉMY. They said the road was blocked by the snow.

SCIPIO. No . . . it's only a quarter hour late.

MADAME RÉMY. Whose luggage ?

SCIPIO. Lady from Livron . . . come for a consultation.

MADAME RÉMY. But she's not due till this evening.

SCIPIO. Wrong. Lady from St. Marcellin this evening.

MADAME RÉMY. Whose bag's this ?

SCIPIO. Old Parp's.

MADAME RÉMY. Monsieur Parpalaid ? No !

SCIPIO. Yes. Outside there now.

MADAME RÉMY. But whatever's he turned up for ?

SCIPIO. Come for a consultation . . . likely.

Madame Rémy turns to the board on which are the numbered hooks and keys.

MADAME RÉMY. But I've only got 9 and 14 free. And I was keeping 9 for the lady from St. Marcellin. And the lady from Livron must have 14. Why didn't you tell him there wasn't a room left ?

SCIPIO. I thought there'd be 14. I'd had no orders about old Parp. How was I to know ?

MADAME RÉMY. It's most annoying.

SCIPIO. You'll manage somehow. Now I've got my patients.

MADAME RÉMY. Nothing of the sort, Scipio. You'll stay here and tell Monsieur Parpalaid that there are no rooms left. I can't.

SCIPIO. Well, I can't. The Doctor's due in five minutes and I've only just time to get my white

coat on. (*He's looking at his note-book now.*) And I've No. 5 to see to. Sputum from 2. Temperature charts, 13, 4, 12, 17, 18 . . . and that's not all. And I'm not going to get into trouble with h i m .

MADAME RÉMY. Can't you even carry the lady's luggage up for her ?

SCIPIO. Where's the nurse ? What's she doing ? Polishing her finger-nails ?

He vanishes. And Madame Rémy, sighting Parpalaid it would seem, vanishes also. Doctor Parpalaid appears, as from his journey, all wrapped up. There i s something strange about the place, though it puzzles him to say what.

PARPALAID. Nobody ! Madame Rémy ! Scipio ! Odd ! Bag still here ! Scipio. . . .

At this moment a most immaculate nurse passes through the hall, carrying some shining, nickle-plated piece of apparatus. Seeing a stranger she pauses benignantly.

NURSE. Can I do anything for you ?

PARPALAID. I . . . I want Madame Rémy.

NURSE. May I ask what for ?

PARPALAID. I want her to show me my room.

NURSE. No . . . there I can't help you, I fear. You're one of the patients that's expected ?

PARPALAID. Patients ! I'm not a patient. I'm a doctor.

NURSE. Oh . . . the new assistant. Well . . . that's a good thing.

PARPALAID. But . . . surely you know me.

NURSE. I'm sorry. No.

PARPALAID. I'm Dr. Parpalaid. I was the doctor here up to three months ago. Ah . . . you don't belong here?

NURSE. Certainly, I belong here. But I never heard of any doctor but Dr. Knock. If you'll excuse me. Madame Rémy will come in a moment, I'm sure. I must finish sterilising my pillow-cases.

She passes on, efficient and immaculate.

PARPALAID. Something very odd has happened to this hotel.

Madame Rémy peeps round a door. "Oh, dear, he's still there," she says. Then she makes up her mind to it and comes out.

MADAME RÉMY. And how do y o u do, Monsieur Parpalaid? You've not come to stay with me at any rate?

PARPALAID. Yes, I have. Well . . . how are things?

MADAME RÉMY. Things are quite well, thank you. I've no rooms free.

PARPALAID. It's not the fair to-day?

MADAME RÉMY. Oh, no.

PARPALAID. Why are you full then? What's happened? Who are all these people?

MADAME RÉMY. Patients.

PARPALAID. Patients.

MADAME RÉMY. Taking treatment.

PARPALAID. But what do they stop here for?

MADAME RÉMY. There's nowhere else to stop. But I'm sure they've nothing to complain of . . .

though it'll be much better when our new wing's built. But they're well looked after. And as far as hygiene goes . . . oh, we're very, very strict.

PARPALAID. But wherever do they come from ?

MADAME RÉMY. The patients ? Lately, from all over the place. To begin with, it was people passing through. . . .

PARPALAID. I don't understand one bit.

MADAME RÉMY . . . on business. And they'd hear all the talk about Dr. Knock . . . and of course they'd want to consult him. They mightn't know what was wrong with them . . . but they'd feel there was something. And great good luck for them it was that they did happen to come here . . . or they'd have been dead now, some of them.

PARPALAID. Why would they ?

MADAME RÉMY. The way they were going on and never giving a thought to it . . . eating things and drinking things, and doing everything they shouldn't !

PARPALAID. And they come and stay here ?

MADAME RÉMY. Why, yes. As soon as ever they've seen the Doctor, to bed they go for treatment. But now it's different. People come more on purpose . . . and we haven't room to put them. But when our new building's ready . . .

PARPALAID. This is amazing.

MADAME RÉMY (*complacently, reflectively*). Yes, I suppose it does seem that to you. And if you led the life the Doctor does, you'd be calling out, I tell you !

PARPALAID. What sort of a life ?

MADAME RÉMY. He's just a galley-slave. The minute he's up he's out to see someone. He's here by ten . . . five minutes more and you'll see him. Then there'll be people waiting for him at home. Then more visits to pay . . . for miles round. Of course, he's got his new car now. That saves time. Sixty miles an hour he can do with it . . . and he does. But often and often he has to sit and lunch in it . . . off a sandwich.

PARPALAID. Oh ! Ah ! Yes . . . it's like that at Lyon with me.

MADAME RÉMY. Is it now ? You took things a bit quieter here. You've not gone back in your billiards, I hope ?

PARPALAID. People certainly don't seem to have been so ill in my time.

MADAME RÉMY (*with some severity*). Oh, it's not that, Monsieur Parpalaid. People didn't know then how to look after themselves . . . which is quite a different thing. There may be some as think we country-folk are no better than heathen savages . . . and that it's no matter what becomes of us. Get along anyhow . . . and if anything goes wrong with you, die like a dog ! And that proper medicines and proper treatment and apparatus and what's up to date is only for city people. Not at all, Monsieur Parpalaid. We're as important as anyone, I hope. And though we may like to make our savings we can spend them too if need be. You're behind the times in your notions of

people here, let me tell you, if you think there's no one that wouldn't let his eye drop out or his leg drop off sooner than spend three francs at the chemist's. No . . . things have changed, thank God!

PARPALAID (*tartly*). Oh, if people that are well would rather be ill . . . a pity to stop them! It's an ill wind that blows the doctor no good.

MADAME RÉMY (*really roused*). I beg your pardon! That's a thing no one can say of Dr. Knock. Didn't he begin by seeing people free? And t h a t never happened here before. If you go to see him and you can afford to pay . . . you pay. And why not, I'd like to know? But he never takes one penny from the poor. Why, he'll go half across the country . . . ten francs' worth of petrol it'll cost him . . . and he'll stop his great fine car in front of some little shanty to see some poor old creature who hasn't even a spare bit of bread and cheese to offer him. And no one need try insinuating that he makes out people are ill when they're not. Look at me. Since he has been coming here every day he has examined me ten times . . . ten times. And each time he has taken the same trouble. He has tapped me and he has listened to me all over . . . and used all his instruments . . . a whole twenty minutes I'll be with him. And each time he says: No, I'm not to worry; that all I need do is to eat well and drink all I want. And he has never charged me one penny! And the same with Monsieur Bernard, the school-

master . . . who got it into his head somehow that he was a germ carrier . . . and got in such a state about it! Well, the Doctor has had every sort of sample of him taken and sent to Paris to be analysed . . . twice! Here's Monsieur Mousquet. He has to help take a blood in No. 15. You talk to him. Here, give me your bag, I'll have to squeeze you in somehow . . . for the sake of old times.

This pæan of praise having quite restored her good temper, Madame Rémy goes off with the bag and Monsieur Mousquet arrives. Whatever the effect of the three months on Madame Mousquet's wardrobe, on his it has been considerable—upon the man himself too. Discreetly prosperous, sleek, self-confident and ready to patronise, we should hardly know Monsieur Mousquet.

MOUSQUET. The Doctor not here yet? Dr. Parpalaid! I thought it was a ghost. Well . . . you are a stranger. How long since we saw you?

PARPALAID. Three months . . . why, it's not three months. . . .

MOUSQUET. Isn't it? No . . . well, how amazing . . . I suppose it isn't. Doing well at Lyon?

PARPALAID. Thank you. Very well.

MOUSQUET. That's right . . . that's right! I suppose you found a nice little practice . . . all ready made.

PARPALAID. I have increased it considerably already. Madame Mousquet is well, I hope ?

MOUSQUET. Much better.

PARPALAID. Was anything the matter with her ?

MOUSQUET. You don't remember ? No. The headaches she was always complaining of. Anyhow, you thought nothing of them. Well . . . Dr. Knock diagnosed a serious lack of pituitary secretion and prescribed the appropriate endocrine with remarkable success.

PARPALAID. So now she's all right ?

MOUSQUET. Yes. Well . . . she doesn't get those headaches any longer. When she gets one now it's from overwork . . . and that's to be expected. For we really are so pressed. I'm looking for a fully-qualified assistant. You don't know of a reliable man ?

PARPALAID. I'll think. . . .

MOUSQUET. I tell you ! I tell you . . . we don't lead the quiet life we did. There's many a night . . . if you'll believe me . . . that I don't get to bed till half-past eleven. And then I won't have finished making up prescriptions.

PARPALAID. Quite a gold mine !

MOUSQUET. Oh, certainly. I do five times the business I did . . . and one mustn't grumble at that. But that's not the only thing. I'm proud of my profession, Dr. Parpalaid . . . and it does me good to feel that I'm benefiting my fellow-creatures. Some of us are like that, you know. Here's the Doctor !

Knock arrives at last: grave, self-contained, authoritative.

KNOCK. Good morning, gentlemen. Ah, Dr. Parpalaid! I was just thinking of you. Have you had a good journey?

PARPALAID. Quite, thank you.

KNOCK. Did you come in your car?

PARPALAID. By train.

KNOCK. Just as well. Let me see . . . we've some business together. That instalment. . . .

PARPALAID. Well, as I am here. . . .

MOUSQUET. You'd like to be alone, gentlemen. (*To Knock*) I'll be in No. 15.

Mousquet goes his way.

PARPALAID. Well . . . you can't say now that you've been taken in.

KNOCK. No fault of yours, my dear friend, if I've not been.

PARPALAID. Come, I sold you my practice . . . and it has proved pretty well worth having.

KNOCK. Oh, you could have stayed on. I don't think we'd have been in each other's way. Has Mousquet told you of the sort of start we've made?

PARPALAID. I've been hearing about it.

Knock proceeds to open the little portfolio which he brought with him, and to take from it various charts which he handles with a pleasing dexterity.

KNOCK. I keep very careful records. Shall I show you one or two . . . just for your own eye? You won't have forgotten our talk three months

ago. First . . . patients seen . . . curve showing weekly totals. Datum line . . . average of patients seen in your time. I forget it . . . but I call it five.

PARPALAID. Five . . . a week! You may call it double.

KNOCK. Right . . . we'll make it double. Now . . . patients seen weekly by me . . . and I'm leaving out those I see free on Mondays. Mid-October . . . 37. End of October . . . 90. End of November . . . 128. End of December . . . not added up yet. But it'll be over 150. But I'll have to drop "Patients Seen" . . . it takes too much time. Here's "Regular Treatments." For after all . . . seeing people casually . . . that's all very well . . . but it's like picking blackberries off a hedge. But "Regular Treatment" . . . ah, that's gardening!

PARPALAID (*with his nose in the charts*). You don't mind my asking . . . are these totals accurate?

KNOCK. Strictly.

PARPALAID. D'you mean to tell me that in one week . . . here in this town . . . one hundred and fifty persons feel ill enough to come knocking at your door to ask advice . . . and pay for it? Without anyone making them?

KNOCK. Well, the police don't bring them.

PARPALAID. Incomprehensible!

KNOCK. Now do let me show you "Regular Treatments." Patients undergoing a course of

regular treatment at home. Datum line . . . end of September, when you left . . . none! (*Parpalaid protests, but in vain.*) End of October . . . 32. End of November . . . 121. End of December . . . well, it'll be between 245 and 250.

PARPALAID. You're making fun of me.

KNOCK. But what is there extraordinary in that? We have 2,853 households in the district and 1,502 incomes of over 12,000 francs.

PARPALAID. Incomes! But what's that got to do with . . . ?

KNOCK. You cannot, of course, expect a family to set anyone aside for regular and constant treatment unless their income is at least 12,000 francs. That would be unreasonable. No . . . these things must be properly regulated. I sift people into four categories. To begin with . . . for families of twelve to twenty thousand francs' income I provide a simple treatment . . . the very simplest . . . involving, say, one visit a week and fifty francs' worth of medicine in the course of a month. And so on till we reach the first category and full treatment . . . for incomes of 50,000 francs and over . . . which will include four visits a week at least and about 300 francs a month spent on such things as X-Rays, radium, massage, analyses . . . and the usual drugs.

PARPALAID. But how do you know what your patients' incomes are?

Knock now makes his preparations for work. His coat comes off. His sleeves

go up, and he turns to the little lavabo, which always hangs in these inn halls, and begins a most elaborate, an almost ritual washing of his hands.

KNOCK. Well, I don't ask the tax-collector. He mightn't tell me . . . and what he told me wouldn't interest me either. Odd, isn't it? By my count there are 1,502 people hereabouts with more than 12,000 francs a year. He makes it only 17. The richest man he knows of has 20,000 francs a year. I could find him one with five times that. So much for bureaucracy!

PARPALAID. But how do you get to know?

KNOCK (*allowing himself a smile*). Never mind. It takes some doing. I spent all October on it. And now I've to keep it up to date. (*With a soapy finger he points to a map on the table which Parpalaid then unfolds.*) Do look at that . . . pretty, isn't it?

PARPALAID. Is it a map . . . oh, yes, of the district. What are all those red dots?

KNOCK. That map is my Survey of the advance of medical science. Each red dot shows a regular patient. A month ago that . . . there . . . looked like a great grey smudge . . . a bad blot . . . the Chabrières blot.

PARPALAID. The . . .?

KNOCK. You know the place. For these last three weeks I've given great attention to it. Well . . . it's still there . . . but it's pinker than it was. You can see from here!

Silence for a moment.

PARPALAID. My dear sir . . . my very dear sir . . . you could knock me down with a feather. No . . . there's no doubt about this . . . everything goes to confirm it. You are a remarkable man. Some of us wouldn't own that to you . . . but we'd think it all the same . . . we'd not be doctors if we didn't. But may I ask you one very blunt question ?

KNOCK. Please.

PARPALAID. If I had your talent and could do what you're doing if I wanted to . . . .

KNOCK. Well ?

PARPALAID. Could I be doing it now . . . with a clear conscience ?

KNOCK. That's for you to say, I should think.

PARPALAID. Mind, I'm not laying down the law. It's a nice point, no doubt.

KNOCK. Make it a little plainer then.

PARPALAID. You may say I'm pernickety . . . that I'm splitting hairs. But isn't all this perhaps done just a little more for the benefit of the doctor than the patient ?

KNOCK. Dr. Parpalaid . . . I think you forget there is a higher cause to be served than either.

PARPALAID. What now ?

KNOCK. The cause of medical science. And I make it mine.

PARPALAID. I see. I see. I see.

And from now on it almost seems as if the cold winter atmosphere gave way to the even colder, stronger light of Science

itself, in which, as is well known, the green and violet rays prevail.

KNOCK. Here in this town live some thousands of people . . . a featureless, meaningless mass of humanity. What is my task? To rescue and resolve each one of them into a scientific individuality, into a medical existence of his own. I put a man to bed. I watch. I wait. Something will come of it. He can't deceive me. Tubercle, neurasthenia, arteriosclerosis . . . it doesn't matter much what as long as it is something. There's nothing irritates me more than the wretched being who is always "pretty well, thank you."

PARPALAID. But you can't put a whole town to bed.

KNOCK. Why not? That remains to be seen. I've known five in a family all ill at once, all in bed at once . . . and they got along excellently. You're like the people who said the War wouldn't last six weeks because no one could afford it. What's wrong is that we doctors are all too timid. I believe I'm the only man amongst you that w o u l d put a whole town to bed . . . and keep it in bed till I found out what was really the matter with it. Though I grant you a certain number of healthy people, so-called, must be kept to look after the unhealthy ones. Or rather, let us think of them as a sort of reserve ready to be called up for treatment when there's time to attend to them. But we cannot have people boasting about their health. That won't do. Overlook it occasionally

. . . yes. Some of them it's a little hard to disabuse. But when it comes to their strutting around and turning one to ridicule . . . no, no, then I get annoyed. As Monsieur Raffalens here has found out.

PARPALAID. What . . . our local Hercules . . . that can lift his mother-in-law up with one hand !

KNOCK. Can he. Well . . . he defied me for close on three months. But it wouldn't do.

PARPALAID. What has happened ?

KNOCK. He's in bed. His bragging was becoming very mischievous . . . it was sapping the whole town's scientific enthusiasm.

PARPALAID. I seem to see one other difficulty though.

KNOCK. Name it.

PARPALAID. Your mind is on medical science . . . nothing else. But there are other interests in the world . . . political, social, intellectual. If you had your way everywhere people might begin to lose hold of them . . . and they have their uses, surely.

KNOCK. They are no concern of mine. I am a doctor.

PARPALAID. True. And when railways or bridges are building they don't ask our advice about that.

KNOCK. Not they ! (*He beckons the other to the window.*) Come here, Dr. Parpalaid. Look. Oh . . . you'll have glanced out often enough between the strokes of those good games of billiards you used to play. Over there Mont Aligre marks us off

from the rest of the world. We can see Mesclat and Trébures on the left . . . if it weren't for the way the town rises up just in front of us I believe we could see every village in the valley. But all you ever saw was the scenery. You've a taste for scenery, as I remember. A rough country-side, barely scratched by civilisation! But I show it you to-day teeming, pullulating beneath the life-giving touch of the noble science of medicine. The first time I stood here looking out . . . the morning after I came . . . I wasn't over confident, I can tell you. It didn't seem to make much odds whether I stood here or not. The whole place turned its back on me. But now . . . like an organist at his keyboard . . . I pull a stop, I touch a note . . . and from far off the sounds respond! In two hundred and fifty of those houses . . . we can't see them all for the distance and the trees . . . there are two hundred and fifty rooms, and in each one at this very moment somebody is testifying to the might of medical science. Upon two hundred and fifty beds those prostrate forms bear witness to life's meaning . . . and through me they are all made one with the great cause I serve. And at night it's more wonderful still. For the lights are lit . . . and they're of my lighting. People with nothing the matter with them go to sleep in the dark . . . blotted out of existence. But the sick man has his nightlight or his lamp. Yes, then everything untouched by the healing art fades away and is forgotten. The

villages vanish . . . and those lights as I look at them are like a starlit sky in which I reign almighty. And, remember, when those men and women wake their thoughts turn first to me and my prescriptions. In a minute or two now you'll hear the clock strike ten. At ten o'clock my patients, every one, take their temperatures for the second time. Picture it, my dear Parpalaid! Two hundred and fifty clinical thermometers lifted in unison and gently placed and held beneath two hundred and fifty silent tongues!

Knock stands rapt in an austere ecstasy. Parpalaid, too, is overwhelmed; but, as it appears, by a somewhat different emotion.

PARPALAID. My dear friend . . . my excellent colleague . . . I've something to suggest to you.

KNOCK. What?

PARPALAID. A little country town's no use to a man like you. You need a city to work in.

KNOCK. That's where you'll find me . . . some day.

PARPALAID. But think. You're now at the very height of your powers. A few years' time . . . it won't be the same. Oh, believe me . . . I know it.

KNOCK. Well?

PARPALAID. Why wait, then?

KNOCK. Do you know of another practice?

PARPALAID. Mine. I'll give it up to you. How better can I show the deep admiration I have for you?

KNOCK. Oh! And what'll you do?

PARPALAID. I . . . will settle down here again.

KNOCK. Ah!

PARPALAID. And what's more, I'll make you a present of those few thousand francs you still owe me . . . as you may remember.

KNOCK. Yes. Quite. You know, you're not quite such a fool as they say you are.

PARPALAID. I beg your pardon.

KNOCK. You're not much good at anything yourself. But you know how to make money out of other people. You have the merchant's mind.

PARPALAID. I beg to assure you that . . .

KNOCK. A bit of a psychologist, too. As soon as I'm making money I cease to care for it, you think. Quite right! Conquering Lyon in the cause of Medicine, I'd forget my curves and my charts here. Yes, I should! Don't worry . . . I don't mean to grow old at St. Maurice. But I'm in no hurry.

Monsieur Mousquet crosses the hall on his way out.

KNOCK. Come here, my dear fellow. D'you know what Dr. Parpalaid is suggesting? That we change practices. I'm to go to Lyon. He'll come back here.

MOUSQUET (*aghast*). You're not serious?

KNOCK. Quite. It's a firm offer.

MOUSQUET. Of all the . . .! Well, of course, you say No.

PARPALAID. Why should he say No, pray?

MOUSQUET. Because if a man offers you an old

gunmetal watch in exchange for a good gold one and you're not quite a lunatic . . . you do say No. Have you asked him to swap motor-cars too ?

PARPALAID. Will you please understand that at Lyon I have a first-rate practice . . . taken over from Dr. Merlu . . . a man of great reputation.

MOUSQUET. But that's three months ago. And things run down hill quicker than you can push them up again. However, it's no great matter, my dear Doctor . . . for the people in St. Maurice simply won't hear of it.

PARPALAID. What's it to do with them ? Who's asking their opinion, I'd like to know ?

MOUSQUET. They'll give it you all the same. I won't say it'll mean rioting . . . we don't do things that way. But you'll find yourself sitting in the train for Lyon with the carriage door locked before you know where you are. Well, if you don't believe me . . . .

At this moment Madame Rémy is passing from kitchen to dining-room carrying a pile of plates.

MOUSQUET. Madame Rémy, I've a piece of good news for you. Dr. Knock is leaving us and Dr. Parpalaid is coming back.

The plates are just saved from destruction.

MADAME RÉMY. What ! Oh, no . . . oh, dear me, no . . . nothing of the sort. I can assure you you'll do no such thing. You'll have to fly off by night in a flying machine. They'll take the tyres off your motor-car to stop you. And as for you,

Monsieur Parpalaid . . . if that's what you're here for I'm sorry to tell you I haven't a room to spare . . . . and January or no January, snow or no snow, you'll have to sleep in the street.

PARPALAID. And this . . . this is how you treat a man that has given twenty-five years of his life to you ! Very well ! If St. Maurice prefers quackery let me earn an honest living in Lyon . . . and a very good living, too. And if I thought for one moment of taking up my old work here again . . . because of my poor wife's health . . . a town life doesn't at all suit her . . . ! Dr. Knock, we will settle our business at once, if you please. I leave this evening.

KNOCK (*benevolently authoritative*). No, no, my dear friend . . . you won't treat us like that. Madame Rémy was so taken by surprise . . . and nothing of the sort's going to happen, Madame Rémy . . . that she nearly dropped her plates . . . and she didn't think what she was saying. But now the crockery's safe . . . look at her. Kindness itself as she always is ! And full of gratitude to you, my dear Doctor . . . as who in St. Maurice is not ? . . . for your twenty-five years of self-effacement in its service.

MADAME RÉMY. I've never said but what Monsieur Parpalaid wasn't always a very nice gentleman. And no doubt he did as well as another while we didn't need any doctoring in particular. But not when there was real illness about. No use telling me that any doctor calling himself a

doctor would have let people die like that of the influenza.

PARPALAID. Calling himself a . . . ! What perfect nonsense ! Do you really suppose, my good woman, that any doctor, whatever he calls himself, can fight an epidemic. As well tell the village policeman to go and arrest an earthquake. You wait for the next . . . and see if Dr. Knock pulls you through it any better than I did.

MADAME RÉMY. Monsieur Parpalaid, there may be things I can't argue over with you . . . such as motor-cars . . . for I know nothing about them. But I do begin to know something about being ill. And let me tell you, it's a town that has all its sickly people in bed to start with can best stand an epidemic when it does come. Being taken by surprise is what you've to guard against. Monsieur Bernard put that very well in his lecture last Thursday : " Carry an umbrella . . . and then let it rain."

MOUSQUET. Take my advice, Doctor . . . don't let yourself in for scientific discussion here. We're all experts now. We've all got our own ideas. The first man you meet in the street will take you on.

KNOCK. But let us not lose ourselves in these academic disputes. Madame Rémy and Dr. Parpalaid may differ profoundly . . . as they do . . . in medical theory . . . personally they can remain on the best possible terms. You've got a room for the Doctor, haven't you ?

MADAME RÉMY. No. I haven't. You know well

through my head scarcely takes the pressure of it. [illegible] . . . I'll get him to understand . . . [illegible] I could not . . . It'd be my duty.

KNOX. Very well, then. Suppose I tell you that Dr. Parpalaid is not in the least upset that otherwise . . . and that, speaking as a medical man, I consider he would have a fine chance for recovery.

MADAME REMY. Oh . . . that's another matter. But he . . . he didn't come here to see you professionally, did he?

KNOX. That, Madame Remy, professional etiquette would quite forbid me to tell you.

MADAME REMY. What's all this? I have this otherwise . . . and there's an end of it.

KNOX. No, my dear Parpalaid, you do not. There's your usual complaint still to be attended. I diagnose your trouble to-day . . . and, if need be, I shall repeat it.

MADAME REMY. Oh, well, of course, Doctor, I don't know that Monsieur Parpalaid shall have a word . . . by all means. Are we to take his prescription?

KNOX. I'll let you know later.

Madame Remy departs, all smiles. Monsieur Monpavon, too, is suitably grave.

MONPAVON. I'll leave you to talk. I've broken my prescription. I must go and get another.

The two are alone. Dr. Parpalaid sits looking up at Knox. Knox's gleaming spectacles are turned full upon him.

PARPALAID. I say . . . you weren't serious then, were you? Still, thanks all the same. I really didn't fancy another eight hours' journey to-night. I'm not so young as I was. You do keep it up very well. The way you said that to me just now! If I didn't know the ropes myself . . .! Your manner . . . the way you look at one . . . as if you saw right inside one. Oh . . . very well done indeed!

KNOCK. It is interesting. For really, I do it almost unconsciously. The minute I set eyes on a man I begin to diagnose his case . . . whether I mean to or not. So much so that lately, d'you know, I've had to stop looking at myself in the glass.

PARPALAID. But . . . you don't mean that you can really diagnose, do you . . .?

KNOCK. Certainly! I tell you that whether I try to or not . . . as soon as I see a man I find myself making note of every little sign and symptom . . . skin, eyes, hair, breathing, beard (*Parpalaid's at the moment*) . . . all sorts of things. And the bit of my brain which puts all this together, which completes the diagnosis . . . works apparently quite automatically. I must take care. That sort of thing makes for insanity.

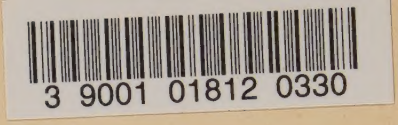
PARPALAID. But . . . forgive me . . . I don't want to make too much of it . . . but I've a reason for asking. When you said I needed a day's rest . . . were you in fun . . . or were you . . .? Because it does fit in with . . . something that has been a little on my mind lately. I have been

noticing one or two trifling things about myself which have . . . well, I mustn't say worried me, but . . . ! So that . . . just for the interest of it . . . I should rather like to know if my own observations . . . fit in, so to speak, with this automatic diagnosis of yours.

Parpalaid finishes with a little nervous laugh. Knock's spectacles seem to gleam more brightly than ever.

KNOCK. My dear sir . . . for the moment we'll let that be. Ten o'clock. I must begin my rounds. But you'll lunch with me, please. And as to the state of your health . . . and whatever may need to be done about it . . . we can go into that in my consulting-room . . . this afternoon . . . at our leisure.

Parpalaid is left to think it over. For the clock chimes and strikes, and Knock goes his way. Then Scipio, the Nurse and Madame Rémy, spotless, capped, and gloved, and bearing various instruments of medical ritual, pass in a sort of procession through the hall.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